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# A JEWISH DIARIST OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS OF THE JEWS IN  
EASTERN EUROPE

BY DR. M. VISHNITZER, London.

RESEARCH in the economic history of the Jews has been neglected as compared with that of the cultural life and religious thought. Even the necessary preliminary work on Jewish economic studies has not been carried out. The vast store of information concerning economic activities which is accumulated in the Rabbinical literature has not been investigated. There are also hidden in family archives various diaries, memoirs, and the correspondence of business men and communal workers. The day when these sources will be added to our knowledge will afford the basis for building up an economic history of the Jews. The present paper, which deals with a small chapter of Jewish economics, is based upon a manuscript in the Jews' College Library. This manuscript is a memoir of a Jewish wine merchant, social worker and well-educated man, Ber Bolechower, or Ber Birkenthal, who lived from 1723 until 1805 in different towns and villages of the area to-day called Eastern Galicia, mostly in Bolechow and Lemberg. Prof. Marmorstein was the first to draw attention to this document in a short article, which appeared in 1913 in the *Zeitschrift für Hebräische Bibliographie*. Prof. Marmorstein then pointed out how important

this document is for the inquiry into the social, economic, and cultural life of Polish Jewry in the eighteenth century, and from it he quoted several extracts. Extracts from the memoirs bearing upon the activities of the Jewish autonomous organizations in Poland were also published in the *Fahrbuch der Jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt a. M., XI (1916), 144-58) by Dr. Lewin, who thus extended his previous studies on the 'History of the Council of the Four Lands'. Another work by Ber Bolechower, entitled *Dibre Binah* has been published by Dr. Brawer in *Ha-Schilaach* (vols. XXXIII and XXXVIII). The manuscript in the Jews' College Library is a purely historical account with numerous autobiographical illustrations. It covers every side of Jewish internal life, as, for instance, domestic customs, education, literary work, communal life and organization. It gives full details of the activities of Jewish self-government in Poland; it reveals the various economic conditions and occupations, as, for example, trade, handicraft, agriculture, and financial operations; and it shows very clearly the relations between the Jews and the non-Jewish population—the Kings, the Nobles, the Clergy, the Citizens, and the Peasants.

In my opinion this manuscript is of the greatest importance for historical research, and exceeds in value, particularly so far as concerns the richness of historical facts and sound judgement of the epoch dealt with, the well-known memoirs of the philosopher Solomon Maimon, and of the remarkable Gluckel of Hameln. The memoirs of Ber Bolechower are written in Hebrew, in a very simple and light style, which sometimes achieves pictorial vividness and strong expression. The manuscript, I regret to say, is not complete. Certain subjects and chapters are

disconnected through lack of parts of the original. Other accounts are given twice, and there is no chronological order at all. The author very often loses his main theme, and is apt to run away from the subject, pointing out occasionally one or another historical or political event.

Before I address myself to the economic and social questions dealt with in the memoir, I will give briefly the biography of Ber Bolechower. His grandfather escaped when he was eight years old from a pogrom in the village of Meseritsh (not far from Brest-Litovsk) in 1648, in the days of Chmielnitsky, and came to Bolechow where he finally settled. His son Judah, Ber's father, made a considerable fortune from the wine trade. He used to go to Hungary every year, or even several times during the year, to buy the famous wines of that country, and to bring them to Poland. He was a man very much respected by his contemporaries, whether co-religionists or not. He knew perfectly the Hungarian language, and took part in the capacity of an official translator in the diplomatic negotiations between Francis II, Rakoczy, and the Polish Commander-in-chief A. Sieniawski. The Hungarian merchants and nobles were kindly disposed to Judah, and welcomed him heartily on the occasion of his visits there.

After many years Ber recalls to mind the first business journey with his father, who was welcomed in every place they visited. 'Everyone was glad to see him, Jews and Gentiles alike. They were especially charmed with his gracious manner in which he spoke to everybody, Jews and Christians in Poland and Hungary alike. They liked to listen to his proverbs and tales in Jewish, Polish, and Hungarian. He mastered all these three languages . . .' I should think that the success which attended the career

of his son Ber, as we shall see later on, was in some way due to the credit which his experienced father won during the long years of his Hungarian business. Ber was, as I have indicated, born in Bolechow in 1723. He was given a religious education, which began as usual in earliest childhood. When eleven years old, Ber received vivid impressions of the unrest which disturbed the whole Polish State, including Bolechow and the neighbouring towns and villages. After the death of Augustus II (1733) two candidates claimed the Polish throne—the son of the late King Augustus and Stanislaus Leszczynski. The latter was supported by France, and the late King's son Augustus by Tsar Peter. The troops of Stanislaus Leszczynski had to retire before the Russian army through Bolechow. Ber remembered that anxious time. He could not forget how the Rabbi of Bolechow, denounced to the Russian commander, Borejka, and in fear of his arrest, left the town on the eve of the Day of Atonement. 'On that day after the morning prayer I saw with my own eyes the Rabbi mounting a horse to flee to the town of Dolina to save his life.'

Thanks to the intervention of Ber's father, who explained to the commander, when he entered Bolechow, that the rumours about the wealth of the Rabbi were false, the latter was able to return to his duties. Ber was attached to his teacher, the Rabbi, who after leaving Bolechow for the community of Brody, retained his interest in his pupil, and tried to have him marry a young lady of a distinguished family. In the meantime Ber continued his Talmudic studies with the son and successor of the Rabbi. He used to visit him on Saturday after the midday meal and to read to him a page of the Talmud, to prove in

this way the achievements of the week. The Rabbi then ordered Ber to study a special passage and took his usual afternoon sleep. Ber had in the meantime to prepare. The passage was usually quite a difficult one, and Ber could not at once grasp the subject. But he found a helper in his need in the sister of the Rabbi, a well-informed lady. Seeing the embarrassment of the boy she asked what the trouble was, and which paragraph he had to study. Then without looking into the volume she explained to him the difficulties, and quoted the corresponding commentary of Rashi.

The marriage of Ber was unhappy, and he obtained a divorce after two and a half years. Later on he married again and devoted himself in the house of the parents of his second wife in Tysmienica (East of Stanislawow) not only to Rabbinical studies, but also to the Polish and Latin languages. Ber found in Tysmienica a circle of well-educated friends. The study of Hebrew language and Hebrew literature was in high favour in the community of Tysmienica. I can see that there was an early, and, hitherto quite unknown, period of the so-called Haskalah movement in a small Galician town, Tysmienica, which—and that is perhaps the salient point—had trade relations with the important business centre Breslau. Some years before the activity of Mendelssohn and his followers there was developed great interest in the Hebrew language. We must recall with gratitude the writer of the memoirs for having thrown so remarkable a light on the spiritual movement in the time of his youth.

The brief years of study were followed by a long life of business. After trying, without great success, trade in brandy, herrings, spices, wax, and skins—which articles he

used to carry to Hungary—he took up, on the advice of his father, the wine business, which he carried on throughout his life, only occasionally holding leases and keeping inns. It was a life of success, scarcely interrupted at all by troubles and sorrows, which Ber overcame rather easily and quickly. He was a well-versed wine merchant. The chief fields of activity were the towns and villages of the north-eastern part of Hungary (Tokay, Tarczal, &c.). Ber was then well acquainted with wine producers. He brought the wives to Bolechow and to Lemberg where he lived for a long time. Ber devoted much time to communal work. He was a member of the provincial Jewish Assembly and very often appeared as spokesman for his community before the landowners, the officials, and the clergy. He was closely connected with the large as well as the less important Jewish affairs of his time. Especially noteworthy was his participation in the famous dispute between the sect of Frankists and the Jews in Lemberg in 1759. He acted then, owing to his thorough knowledge of the Polish language, as interpreter for the Jews.

Amid his communal activities and business affairs, which increased more and more every year, Ber found time for the pursuit of knowledge. He acquired new languages, German and French. He made time for literary work.

The first forty-two pages of the manuscript preserved in the Jews' College are a translation made by Ber, from Polish into Hebrew, of part of a famous work of the Italian historian and geographer Giovanni Botero, 'Relazioni universali', in the Polish version entitled 'Teatrum Swiata', and, secondly, a translation from German into Hebrew, of part of the well-known book of the English writer, Humphrey Prideaux, entitled 'Con-

nection of the Old and New Testament in the History of the Jews and neighbouring nations from the Declension of the Kingdom of Israel and Judah to the time of Christ' (London, 1716-18). The German edition of this work used by Ber is entitled 'Alt und Neu Testament in eine Connexion mit der Juden und benachbarten Völker Historie gebracht' (by Löscher, Dresden, 1726). As a matter of fact Ber met different merchants from various countries. Lemberg was a centre where French, German, Armenian, Russian, and other merchants used to meet. Ber one day made the acquaintance of a young German clerk, John Labadie, who came to Lemberg with his principal, a famous Parisian merchant. The clerk arranged with Ber to give him German lessons and learn Hebrew from him. Both—Ber and the clerk—made good progress in their studies. The clerk, the son of rich parents, devoted himself later entirely to Hebrew and Oriental studies. He presented his first Hebrew teacher, Ber Bolechower, with a German translation of Humphrey Prideaux's book.

To speak of Ber's literary activity would be a matter of special attention. I must concentrate here on the social and economic conditions of Polish Jewry in the eighteenth century, upon which the writer of the manuscript throws a remarkable light. He himself belonged to the class of well-to-do merchants which we scarcely find represented among the Jewish traders of those days. As I pointed out in another work (namely, in the *History of the Jews in Russia*, vol. I, published in 1914 in Moscow), the eighteenth century was a period of decline, of the crumbling away of Jewish fortunes, of the growth of a mass of small traders, workmen, small farmers, and innkeepers.



The area covered by Ber and his companions was the western district of the Ukraine, where from the very beginning of their settlement the Jews played an important part in the economic life of the community. The Duchies of Halicz and Volhynia, which assumed political and economic significance during the twelfth, thirteenth, and fourteenth centuries under the rulership of energetic and clever Grand Dukes, were the actual nurseries of Ukrainian Jewry.

Among the many colonists whom the Dukes endeavoured to attract as settlers in their domains were the Jews. Several Jewish settlements then sprang into existence. The new arrivals took part in rural colonization and in commerce which was mostly concentrated in the towns of Halicz and Lemberg.

When, in the fourteenth century, the national independence of these countries ceased, and they came under the rule of the Poles and Lithuanians, the Jewish settlements nevertheless continued to develop. The sixteenth century represents the zenith in the history of the Ukrainian Jewry. This point must be specially emphasized concerning the Jews of that large and rich area, which is now called Eastern Galicia or Western Ukraine; and which in earlier times was known also under the name Red Russia. It was the cradle of Ber and his father. It was a Jewish centre; remarkable through all the centuries down to our own time. In the sixteenth century the Jews formed there about five per cent. of the whole of the inhabitants, and about twenty per cent. of the urban population. They contributed generally to the economic advancement of the country which had suffered severely owing to attacks by the Tartars, but was now gradually recovering.

The activities of the Jews were by no means one-sided.

They rendered valuable services to the state as lessees of taxes of the salt mines at Kolomea, Drohobycz, and other localities. They managed or supported with their capital, industrial undertakings; as, for instance, the production of sulphur, potash, and tar. They also played their part in commerce, on a large scale, by extending and increasing the trade connexions with Hungary, Moldavia, Turkey, and the towns of the Black Sea littoral. These connexions were soon extended to the Orient.

The capital of Red Russia, Lemberg, at that time passed through a period of prosperity, as a centre of powerful mercantile undertakings. It was also the seat of the largest Ukrainian Jewish community which reached the height of its development at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth century. In addition to trading with the Orient, the Jews devoted themselves to dealings in cattle, timber, grain, and wine. Moreover, the activity of the Jews in the colonization of the central and eastern districts of the Ukraine was considerable, when in the sixteenth century these districts came within the range of civilization. We find Jews as founders of villages, as lessees, bailiffs, and stewards of the Polish landlords and the gentry (*szlachta*). Lastly, they were already engaged as craftsmen; and not as individuals here and there, but in guilds, which had their special rules drawn up following the lines of the general guilds.

While the government assisted and protected the Jews, assuring them in their rights, there were already, among the aristocracy as also among the citizens, perceptible efforts towards curbing the hitherto unrestrained activity of the Jews in the economic sphere. The nobility had gradually taken the entire business of dealing in grain into

their own hands; and if the Jews subsequently were engaged in that kind of business, it was only at the behest or in the service of the nobility. Generally speaking, the nobility were envious of the advantages which the kings derived from their Jewish subjects, and consequently endeavoured with success to make the Jews that were settled on their property subject to their jurisdiction, and to obtain the right of imposing taxes on the Jews.

The Polish State Assembly enacted in 1539 a law, dividing the Jews into two categories—the Jews of the king, and the Jews of the nobility. This act was of the greatest and gravest consequence for the future of Ukrainian Jewry. In this way a considerable portion of the Jewish population was withdrawn from the influence of the king, and became subjects (or, rather, serfs) to the nobility, and were, therefore, at the mercy of the individual members of the gentry. For the 'gentry Jew' now began a period of complete denial of right. He was delivered body and soul to the whim of an irresponsible master; who was able to use him or abuse him for and in any position, who could and did make him his factotum, his court-jester, and so forth. The attitude of the non-Jewish town population, now so overbearing towards the Jews, also became vastly different. The competition of Jewish merchants and Jewish craftsmen was regarded by the other citizens as obnoxious, and thus all too soon a severe struggle ensued, fluctuating sometimes to the advantage of the non-Jews, sometimes to the advantage of the Jews, but, in general, undermining more and more the economic position of the latter.

During these dramatic commercial struggles between Jewish and Christian guilds, the Jews found efficient support from the organs of the Jewish Self-Government,

that had grown in the course of years to considerable strength. The Elders of the Jewish Communities fought with all diligence for the protection of the members of their congregations, and in cases of important actions the Deputies of several communities, which formed special provincial councils, met to consider the steps to be taken for the defence of the Jewish cause.

Thus we can trace the beginning of the decline of Ukrainian and Polish Jewry from their former prosperous condition. Under the pleasant external circumstances in the sixteenth century the inner life of the Jewish communities could develop favourably. Jewish culture, Jewish scholarship, Jewish literature had in fact reached a high standard in the Ukraine in the sixteenth century. Lemberg, Ostrog, Wladimir-Wolynsk, Lutsk, Nemirow, and many other towns were famous as the seats of eminent rabbis, whose works are still held in high esteem. The Talmudic academies of Lemberg and Ostrog enjoyed great repute. Cardinal Commendoni, who travelled in this country in the middle of the sixteenth century, bore witness to the fact that the Jews of the Ukraine devoted themselves to astrology and medical science.

I venture to think that this brief sketch of Jewish life in the sixteenth century will help us to understand and to appreciate the statements contained in our manuscript concerning conditions in the eighteenth century, which as far as concerns Eastern European Jewry is usually known as a period of decline. Looking back on those unpleasant years we have to recall, first, the decline in the general political and economic life in Poland, brought on partly by the corrupt nobility and indolent population of the towns, and secondly, the persecutions and massacres of the Jews

during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These persecutions were very often connected with sanguinary risings of the suppressed Ukrainian peasantry against the Polish landowners and the Polish officials who protected their masters and helped them to enslave the Ukrainian people.

The Polish noble hated and despised the peasant, his serf, he condemned and ill-treated the Jew, after he had made him the medium of the exploitation of the peasant masses. If we find some praiseworthy exceptions, they do not alter our judgement of the whole, a judgement corroborated several times in the memoirs of Ber Bolechower dealing as they do with the general feelings against the Jews, as they prevailed among the gentry.

The moral suffering of the ill-treated Jews was even greater than the material damage caused by outrage and persecution.

The memoirs clearly show the humiliating position of the Jew, subjected to the mercy of the landowner. The latter was indeed the only ruler, and upon his good or evil spirit depended very often the welfare of individual Jews or whole Jewish Communities. There was indeed no other power in the Polish State. The kings were only shadows. The central administration had no influence at all, and the local officials acted in fullest agreement with the nobles. Ber tells us in great detail how much energy was necessary to save the honour and the position of the famous Rabbi Chaim Cohen Rappoport (the chief orator on the side of the Jews in the dispute with the Frankists) from the chief official of the voievod August Czartoryski in connexion with a judicial decision of that Rabbi. It would take much time to narrate this story, so dramatically told by Ber, who

owing to his perfect knowledge of the Polish language was able to revise the letter of the Rabbi to that official, in which he explained his case.

Another striking fact is the following: The Prince Jablonowski established himself against the will of his relatives as the guardian of the young Count Wielhorski, who owned the town of Tysmienica. The Elders of the Jewish Community were denounced to the Prince as having worked against him. The Prince, accordingly, decided to punish the Community. 350 barrels of honey were brought from his estate in the Ukraine, and the Jews had to buy them at the price of eight ducats each, although the market price was only six ducats. It was really an arbitrary act of taxation, or, rather, robbery. Other Polish nobles, as, for instance, the Prince Martin Lubomirski, amused themselves in assaulting the Jewish traders on the high roads and plundering their stores.

All the troubles arose from the nobles. The Jewish subjects always lived in fear of them. Ber Bolechower had complete insight into these conditions; he knew perfectly well the mentality of the Polish Gentry. He observed and studied them on many occasions—dancing and gambling in the salons of Warsaw, quarrelling and drinking during the sessions of the Diet.

There was another element in public life upon which the welfare of the Jews so much depended. The Polish clergy had great influence. The students of the Catholic colleges made a speciality of attacking the Jewish shops and houses, in plundering them, and in beating the Jewish people. This barbarous behaviour had received the sanction of custom. The Jewish Communities preserve in their annuals description of these regularly reported pogroms,

called 'The Scholars' Onset'. Ber speaks about the last onset in Lemberg, emphasizing the fact that this evil had for a long time been chronic. 'It very often happened that in the course of a quarrel between a Jew and a student of the College the other pupils (the sons of the nobles) made "The Students' Onset" and rushed into the Jewish quarter, beat and killed the Jews, and plundered their shops. The Jews had to flee in order to save their lives—and the students plundered and robbed at their will.'

Never could I fully realize the state of chaotic anarchy in ancient Poland till I had read the stories in Ber's manuscript. Bearing in mind that there was no real central or kingly power, that every noble in his area was a despotic and capricious ruler, and that there were thus a hundred or a thousand states in that fragile and undermined Republic, we may imagine the shaken position of the Jews.

We learn from the manuscript that the Jews of Bolechow had their own police, which watched the whole night over the safety of the Jewish quarter. A band of ruffians came one morning (just after the police had gone home to their rest) to the house of a certain R. Nachman. The bandits found the fire still burning, around which the police had been watching, and the beadle of the synagogue sleeping near the fire. They awakened him, and commanded him to open the door of the house. What followed was a regular pogrom, sketched by Ber with the greatest accuracy. The attacked houseowner defended himself and wounded the head of the band by a shot of a gun.

The Jewish race is vital and equal to every misfortune. We shall have to examine how the contemporaries of Ber,

including himself, succeeded in their business, and what were the economic conditions.

The type of large Jewish farmer which we so often met with in the sixteenth century, had almost died out two hundred years later, in the time of Ber Bolechower. Of one of them our author retained a strong impression. This farmer was called Saul Wahl, just as the famous communal leader of the sixteenth century, who lives in the legend until the present time as the 'Jewish King of One Day'. I assume this farmer was a descendant of the founder of this well-known old family. The Saul Wahl, depicted in the Memoirs, was a wise and highly respectable person, esteemed by Jews and non-Jews. He was acquainted with agricultural work from his earliest youth. He devoted the larger portion of his life to farming large estates from the nobles, and for some time even the town of Stryi, with the surrounding villages; also on another occasion the town of Skole. With his usual accuracy, Ber tells us that Saul Wahl was self-taught in all kinds of agricultural work, including cattle-breeding. He carried on his business with success (although he was in debt to the nobles) so that he earned sufficient means for his large family, which included ten sons and one daughter. But his position was not secure nor based on firm foundations. The time when Polish nobles preferred to farm out their estates to Jews had passed. Many of those farmers had to take up a new occupation, having been removed from their task by the landowners. Thus Saul Wahl was told one day by the owner of Stryi that he need not trouble any more about continuing the farm. The reason, Ber tells us, was that Count Poniatowski, with whom Saul Wahl was on good terms, decided to administer his estates



by his own officials. The situation of Saul Wahl was precarious. He had not money enough to meet all his obligations. Upon the advice of Ber's father, he turned to the wine trade, which enabled him to pay his debts.

On the other hand farming of small properties, of country inns, of different revenues of the towns (from mills, inns, trading, &c.), belonging to the estates of the Nobles, was widely spread among the Jewish population. It was not because of any special predilection for that kind of profession, but, as Ber points out, it was provoked by the economic conditions of the Jews at that time. The Jews were, as a rule, indebted to the nobles, and often not in a position to meet regularly their obligations. In order to avoid vexations and the confiscation of their goods, the Jews had to secure the protection of some of the nobles against the others, their creditors. Ber Bolechower was himself one of those Jewish traders indebted to the nobles, and was one day induced to lease the revenues of the town of Bolechow in order to win the assistance of the landlord of the estate, and in view of the fact that no one of his fellow-Jews was willing to apply for the lease because of the losses it had brought to its former holders. Ber is constrained to admit that the Rabbi of the Community was only right in advising him to hold the lease, as it would be for his benefit. 'The Rabbi's contention', says Ber, 'was that our creditors would be impressed by it, and that our landlord would also be obliged to protect us against the creditors'.

Ber quotes another case when a Jew was constrained by a noble to take up a lease under the threat of being expelled from his native place, and removed to a new hamlet not covered yet with buildings. The notion of the

Jewish farmer eager for exploitation appears thus in a new light.

The memoirs preserve other evidences of the indebtedness of Jewish farmers and merchants to nobles and to the clergy. *Tempora mutantur!* In the early period of their history in Poland, Jews were to a great extent engaged in money-lending. In the course of centuries the conditions changed more and more. The former debtors became the creditors of the Jews. The memoirs provide most striking facts about the indebtedness of the Jewish population to the upper classes of the Polish nation. Ber knew exactly those circumstances, being several times in need, and compelled to borrow money from the gentry, and the monasteries. On the other hand, I have not been able to ascertain many cases where non-Jews were indebted to Jews. I think that money-lending by the Jews was practised then but little. Ber himself was exhorted by the relatives of his wife to abstain from this kind of business, which he was inclined to choose, and to take up trade, as did his father, who at the beginning of his career was a farmer, and devoted to agriculture. It is interesting to follow Ber's account of the way in which his father went from farming to trading. The estates held in farm by Ber's father were situated in the mountains, and, therefore, not over-fertile. But the rent of the farm had to be paid, and the peasants had to be employed. Ber's father arranged an agreement with the owner of the salines at Bolechow to furnish him with wood from the forest in exchange for a barrel of salt for each load of wood. This work went on during the whole of the winter, and many barrels of salt were thus collected. In the summer, Ber's father sent out the labourers to bring salt on their wagons

to Podolia, a fine fruit-bearing province, which to this day is famous for its good harvests.

There again bartering took place. A barrel of salt was exchanged for one barrel, and sometimes even one-and-a-half barrels or even two barrels of rye. From the rye liquors were distilled, an article much in demand in Galicia, and particularly in Hungary, where large quantities were bought. Ber's father made a great fortune, and then started the wine trade in Hungary, which in time became his chief business, and was carried on by his sons, including Ber.

It would take me a long time to treat even in the briefest way Ber's activities, which are so minutely related by himself on almost every page of the memoirs. Every year, or sometimes even twice a year, he travelled to Hungary, visiting there the localities famous for their wines, as, for instance, Tokay, and after assuring himself on the qualities of those wines, transacted business on his own account, on the account of his companions, and on behalf of some of the nobles and the clergy, who gave him special orders. Ber's reputation must have been very high. We learn that well-known French wine merchants who came to Poland for their business entered into close relations with him.

We gather full details concerning prices, money exchange, and fluctuations in the value of the Polish gulden. We walk under the guidance of Ber through the fairs of Breslau, the counting-houses in Warsaw, Lemberg, and many Hungarian and Galician towns. We pass through inns crowded with the Deputies of the Polish Diet and officials of the High Courts. For it must be emphasized that on those occasions many of the casks of the valuable Hungarian and Spanish wines from Ber's cellars were

consumed by the Deputies, and bought for them by the few great nobles, who sought to win the majority for their political aims. The rank and file of the Deputies were also accessible to other kinds of bribery, such as watches and jewelry.

We become quite intimate with the practices of various groups of merchants, Jewish and non-Jewish.

During one of his frequent sojourns at Tarczal (Hungary) Ber was requested by the partners of a Jewish wine firm there 'to look into their business accounts'. 'Each', says Ber, 'brought his writings and registers and laid them on the table in my room, which was full of them. I sat down to read these documents and to find out from the whole and from each document in particular the figures showing the purchase of the wines, the expenses involved, and the particulars of the sale. After five days spent in investigating and examining those papers I found out the proper way for bringing their accounts into order. They had, in fact, carried on their business for more than three years. They had bought over 1,000 casks of wine, which had been stored in twenty wine-cellars, and had been sold in retail for different amounts. I made out a report containing all the purchases of the wines; the number of casks and their value; the different sorts; from which Christian producer they were bought; and in which cellar they had been stored. Another report referred to the affairs of the sale—to whom the wines had been sold, and for what amount they were sold. Further, I noted all the expenses incurred in the transport of the wines to their destination, and, also, how much there had leaked from every cask, the amount being one cask a month for every hundred casks,—which is a factor to be taken into account by all wine-traders.

After the calculation was made, there still remained twenty casks unaccounted for, and nobody knew who had taken them or emptied them. After having deducted all the losses and heavy expenses, there remained for the firm a net profit of 2,100 ducats, which, divided into three parts, gave to each partner 700 ducats. They remunerated me for the trouble of putting their accounts in order with two casks of ritual wine made from selected grapes.'

Ber was very keen on keeping his own accounts in proper order. He carefully describes how he 'prepared two books of account, made of two pounds of paper, the one for the wine shops and the other for the mills. The registers were ruled on each page. Every fee was to be inserted on its page in small writing, from which source derived, and by whom paid.'

We learn about the existence at Bolechow of a Guild (Holy Society) of Shopkeepers. They always met during the lesser days of the Feast of Tabernacles in order to appoint Administrators, Heads, and other officials of the Guild. On the day of Solemn Assembly they always arranged a great banquet. The Guild established a fee of half a Kreuzer (nearly a farthing) for each stone of goods, and the same payment for every pot of honey measured. The weighing-machine and measures were let out for at least 150 Polish gulden yearly.

The rôle played in foreign trade by the Jewish Communities of Brody, Tysmienica, and Lemberg, judging from the illuminating statements scattered here and there in the memoirs, was a very important one. I venture to say that the greater part of the clear account and concise information given by Ber throws a new light upon Jewish commerce in the eighteenth century, and it is therefore

only right to claim the discovery of the manuscript in the Jews' College as of first importance. It brings us plenty of new and interesting facts, which can only be welcome to every scholar deeply interested in the subject of Jewish economics.

I would not fulfil my task if I did not mention the Jewish handicrafts of that time. As I have already said, there were guilds of Jewish artisans as early as the sixteenth century. I have dealt with this matter in that volume of the *History of the Jews in Russia*, to which I referred above. There were, among others, guilds of goldsmiths. The guild of Jewish goldsmiths in Lemberg was well known. Ber placed an order for some synagogal utensils which were so beautifully wrought that many experts confessed that never 'have been seen such utensils in Poland'.

The memoirs preserve a new version about the abolition of the central bodies of the Jewish Self-Government in Poland and Lithuania. The Polish Diet of 1764 passed a law ordering the dissolution of the Council of the Four Lands, the Council of Lithuania, and the numerous provincial assemblies which represented the Jewish Communities. Until now, our historians have explained this measure of the Polish Diet as a means to a more adequate taxation of the Jewish population, as the law we have mentioned ordered that the taxes of the Jews be collected by the crown officials—fixing a certain tax for each Jew over one year of age—and not, as it had been previously done, by the provincial and central assemblies or councils elected by the Jewish communities.

In the memoirs of Ber Bolechower we find something

concerning this important fact. I would like to quote the exact words of Ber's statement :

‘ And now I will tell of the great change done in the Polish country with the purpose of humiliating our people of Israel, and about the taking away of that little honour they had always enjoyed since the time they came to Poland to settle there, that is 900 years ago, until the King Poniatowski ascended the throne. In those days the Poles, namely, the nobles, believed and emphasized that the Elders of Israel who used to meet at Warsaw during the Sessions of the Polish Diet in connexion with the poll-taxes to be paid by the Jews to the Crown, caused the Diets to be dissolved,—the Diets which were convoked by the expenditure of considerable means.’ Ber continues with the purpose of explaining his statements: ‘ Every Diet was attended by many deputies who were Jew-baiters, who denounced the Jews for every kind of wickedness, that they might be deprived of their liberties, and that they should be forbidden to carry on trade in cattle, wine, and other articles. The constitution of Poland admitted of one member of the Diet, i.e. a ‘ Szlachcic ’ (noble) being able to stop the business of the Diet, saying: I do not agree to this matter. The Polish nobles endeavoured to make it believed, that the Jews were the instigators of the suspension of the business of the Diets, that they paid large sums of money to some of the members of the Diets to dissolve the Diets by the proceedings we have mentioned. Therefore the order was given by the crown for the abolishing of the Jewish Assemblies. Furthermore, the Diet decided that non-Jewish Commissioners ought to be sent into all the provinces of Poland to inquire as to the number of the Jews who had to pay to them the taxes. Then, argued the Poles, there will be no need for electing Jewish Elders, who would destroy all the laws of our Diet.’

Ber Bolechower was so well-informed about Jewish and general affairs of his days, that I am disposed to trust also his account of this matter. He was in great sorrow about the abolition of the Jewish Councils and Assemblies, as he assumed that they were a 'small solace to the children of Israel, and a little honour to them, and witness that God in His great Pity has not left us'. For, as Ber tells us, it is said in the Mosaic law: 'and yet for all that when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God'.

In a few remarkable words Ber describes the useful work done by the wise and learned members of the Jewish Assemblies, which afforded an opportunity for discussing every Jewish question. The Rabbinical members of these Assemblies formed at the same time the high tribunals for legal causes. These institutions existed, according to the statements of Ber Bolechower, for 800 years, which statement is incorrect, as we know that the first Assemblies could not have met earlier than at the beginning of the sixteenth century.

Another statement is more interesting. Ber tells us that he had seen printed copies of the decisions of those Assemblies. As a matter of fact we are to-day not in possession of these decisions or minutes. We have only the full minutes of the meetings of the Lithuanian Jewish Council, beginning from 1623 until 1763. That wonderful and most important document was published by the Jewish Historical and Ethnographical Society at Petrograd, whose Committee I have served. The minutes of the Jewish Council or Assembly in Poland are in all likelihood lost. Certain parts of them and several decisions are, of course,



known; as they used to be written down in the minute-book of the great Jewish Communities in Lemberg, Cracow, Posen, and other towns. I myself saw some of the original sheets from these minutes in the private library of the historian Dubnow. That is all that remains.

My paper can only raise the window a little to peep into the rich storehouse to which these memoirs may be compared. I hope to publish the manuscript in full as soon as possible, provided material help for this undertaking be forthcoming from Jewish scientific bodies and individuals interested in fostering Jewish history and literature.